

**West Mojave Plan  
Task Group 2  
Green Tree Inn, Victorville  
July 25, 2001**

**Attendees**

**Task Group:** Jim Atkins, Pam Barber, Michael Connor, Jeri Ferguson, Ken Foster, Jennifer Foster, Mary Grimsley, Joan Kahn, Peter Kiriakos, Paul Kober, Carol Landry, Sophia Merk, Lorelei Oviatt, Lyle Palma, Doug Parham, Nancy Perry, Eddie Phillips, Mary Anne Phillips, William Pollard, Warren Puhio, Darrell Readmond, Bob Saderup, Bob Sackett, Ron Schiller, Ray Sims, Robert W. Smith, Deborah Stevens, Marian Stovich, T. C. Turner, Barbara Veale, Hector Villalobos.

**West Mojave Team:** Bill Haigh, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks

**Introductions**

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:15 P.M., and introductions were made. Bill indicated that he will provide a status update on the route designation process, and Les Weeks will discuss some ideas on resolving outstanding public issues and concerns.

**Update**

Haigh indicated that three major issues have been raised by the public in regards to the route designation process :

- Volume of work. Too much work to be done during the wrong time of the year.
- Too little time to do the work.
- Accuracy of route network.

Haigh said that given the concern about the amount of workload involved in reviewing the route network for the 21 subregions, staff has critically examined each of the subregions to determine which are most important to completing the West Mojave Plan. The five subregions being completed per the Center for Biological Diversity lawsuit (Newberry-Rodman, Red Mountain, Superior, Fremont, Kramer) plus about six other subregions (Pinto, Coyote, Middle Knob, El Mirage, El Paso, Ridgecrest and possibly Granite) were deemed to be the most important subregions. The remaining subregions are not as critical to the West Mojave Plan and could be completed in a later phase and processed through a plan amendment cycle. Bill indicated that it is important for all 21 subregions to be completed in a timely manner as it has been two decades since the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert Plan initially mandated route designation for Class L lands.

Regarding the accuracy issue, Haigh proposed that the route network be ground truthed and the corrected as necessary. CH2MHill has been asked to develop a scope of work for this effort.

Because route designation primarily affects public lands, a decision to phase the work and to conduct on-the-ground surveys is subject to the approval of BLM's managers. There has been concern expressed within the BLM that route designation needs to be completed in as timely a manner as possible. It is also important that the more critical subregions be completed in conjunction with the West Mojave Plan to ensure a balance between multiple use and species conservation as mandated by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

The following questions and comments were made by those present:

- What would the status of the routes be prior to being reviewed? Haigh responded that the status would be the same as it is today, with the exception of the five subregions affected by the settlement agreement.
- Mike Connor expressed concern about delaying work on some of the subregions, and asked that a list of sensitive species by subregion be compiled so that the affects of such a delay can be better assessed.
- Lorelei Oviatt questioned why El Paso and Ridgecrest were included in the first phase since it was her understanding that neither was critical for sensitive species. Bill Haigh responded that these were included primarily because so much staff work had already been expended on these areas and the public was already providing input.
- Sophia Merk expressed concern about the accuracy of the land ownership base. She indicated that she has raised this issue many times and believes that the base is not accurately showing the ownership status of smaller parcels. She is concerned that BLM will not consider access for the private parcels improperly shown as public on the maps. BLM staff indicated that access to private parcels cannot be denied. Others expressed concern that while the private property owner may maintain his rights, others who visit may be denied access. Some expressed concern that private property owners in the area may not be aware of this issue and felt they should be notified. Others were concerned about the nature of the access to a private inholding that would be provided: routes capable of accommodating four wheel drive vehicles? Two wheel drive? Construction equipment and large trailers? The field survey of the network could help determine what roads are currently being used to access private parcels of land.
- In response to a question, Bill Haigh clarified that 1995 is the date of the aerials from which the route inventory was developed.
- Marie Brashear suggested that the amount of use a road gets be a factor in determining closure. She recommended that all roads that received less than a certain number of vehicles passing over in a year remain open.

### **Status of CH2MHill Work**

Les Weeks, recreation subconsultant for CH2MHill, introduced himself and described how he is trying to develop additional criteria for the route designation process, focusing on recreational values. He expressed that this is a difficult task as different trails have different meanings and values to different user groups. He described how CH2MHill is attempting to develop a valuing system that would provide a more systematic and defensible approach to route designation.

The following comments were made:

- Pam Barber expressed concern that we are trying to focus on such a huge area. She suggested concentrating the effort on those areas where there have been abuses or problems. She feels that adequate reasons for the closure of certain routes has not been provided (i.e. Kane Wash). Others expressed concern that if you close hot spot areas, the users will simply go elsewhere and create new problems.
- Lorelei Oviatt suggested an option that would identify and focus on routes with the most impact on species. This would better focus on the problem of which routes are most severely impacting species. She indicated that the criteria currently provided in the reports are insufficient and do not state the reason why one route is closed while another remains open.
- Concern was expressed that the BLM must consider RS2477 rights.
- Jim Atkins suggested comparing 1970's and 1995 aerials to create a more accurate base. He indicated that if a road has been there since the 70's, it should remain open.
- Ron Schiller indicated that data (i.e. soils data) is needed prior to designating routes on maps, and that frequency of use is an important factor to consider. He indicated that it is important to realize that as you close areas off, folks will move into and heavily use the remaining areas. He also noted that when FLPMA was passed 30 years ago, off road vehicles were very different than they are today.
- Marie Brashear stated that under RS2477, if a route was in existence prior to 1976, then it can't be closed. She indicated that prescriptive rights is also an issue, and that each individual road needs to be considered in this regard.
- West Mojave Team staff was asked to consider whether the purchases of private lands by the Wildlands Conservancy helps to offset the impacts of the Fort Irwin expansion.
- Pam Barber indicated that specific rationale for route closure needs to be provided in the reports, and that criteria that states a road "might" impact a species is unacceptable. She also noted that numbers need to be assigned to individual closed routes to facilitate communication with staff and other public.
- Bob Smith, field representative for San Bernardino County Supervisor Bill Postmus, stated that feedback needs to be provided to the public in response to the concerns they have expressed. He asked for specific responses from West Mojave Team staff regarding how public issues regarding the route designation process are being responded to.
- Peter Kiriakos suggested that recently developed "change detection software" could assist in a comparison between recent and 1970's aerial photography.
- Jeri Ferguson indicated that her group has not bought off on the proposed list of phase one and phase 2 route designation. She feels the phase one effort should focus on the DWMAs, and questions whether Granite is really a priority area. She feels additional information is needed before she could accept all 12 areas.
- Mike Connor suggested putting the GIS resource overlays on the West Mojave Plan website. Bill Haigh responded that BLM GIS staff are looking at how this could be done.
- Marie Brashear questioned how the consultants will go about looking at the route network and assign a numerical value to routes. She pointed out that what different people want are not numerically equal. She feels that all routes have recreational value to someone, or

they would not be there. She would like to see the emphasis on biological values. If route not affected by biological resources, then don't close the route.

Les Weeks presented the proposal developed in response to concerns regarding accuracy of the route network. He indicated that CH2MHill and West Mojave Team staff were developing a proposal for a 100% on-the-ground survey of routes in the West Mojave. He explained that ten teams of at least two persons (a driver, and a note taker possessing a natural resource/earth science/planning background) would be assigned the survey work to be performed between now and mid December. He calculated that approximately 30 miles of road per day per team could be covered.

The following comments and suggestions were made:

- Bob Smith indicated that staff should contact San Juan County Utah. He indicated that staff there, working with four teams, took 18 months to accomplish the survey.
- Marie Brashear asked that all routes, including those currently closed, be looked at. She feels that the solution offered will not work.
- Discussion took place regarding whether the proposed process would result in consistent decisions. Jeri Ferguson commented that different people will apply different values to the same route. She feels that more consistency can be achieved by having people note attributes of the routes or what was observed rather than trying to place a value on a route for a certain type of use.
- Ron Schiller requested that staff provide the Task Group with the current BLM policy on RS2477. He also requested that cumulative mitigation, including route closures within Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and wilderness areas, be taken into account as route designation moves forward.
- Bill Haigh noted that permission can be given to travel and inventory routes in those areas where emergency closures have taken place.
- Lorelei Oviatt expressed concern about the proposed weighting system. She would like to see something in writing that better explains this. Jeri Ferguson concurred and asked that the model be provided prior to the next meeting.
- Mike Connor expressed concern about phasing or dropping polygons. He again asked for an accounting of species by subregion, and suggested that the final decision to phase or not should be made by the Supergroup.

Bill Haigh indicated that he will be discussing this approach with Tim Salt and the BLM's field office managers. He also noted the interest from various groups to participate in the inventory process and will look at how they might assist the survey teams.

### **Next Meeting**

Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 9 P.M. at the Green Tree Inn, Victorville [later rescheduled to Thursday, August 30, 2001, same time and location].